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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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INFORMATION REPORT

COUNTRY Bulgaria

SUBJECT Pattern of Daily Life in Pleven: Housing / Working
Hours / Purchase of Food

DATE ACQUIRED

DATE DISTR. 8 FEB 1954

NO. OF PAGES 3

NO. OF ENCLS.

SUPP. TO
REPORT NO.

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1. "The daily routine [redacted] in Pleven typifies that of the average Bulgarian family today. The following observations date to Jul 53.

2. "The family consists of four members. The husband, about 50, is a craftsman. His own workshop was taken over by the State. He is now employed in the same place as a skilled worker, earning about 600 lev per month. He is a sick, embittered man, always silent, afraid of his own shadow. The wife, about 42, is lively and energetic. She is constantly overloaded with social work by the CP and various political organizations, although she is not a Party member. She has to run her household, but not a day passes without her being requested to notify people about a meeting, to collect money, to prepare something for a special occasion in the Party club, to enroll people for some kind of Sunday work etc.. The daughter is 15, the son nine. Both children are in school.

Housing Facilities

3. "The husband used to be well off. He bought a plot of land and after World War II started building a house. This house is still unfinished. The family live on the ground floor. The second floor has no windows or doors.

4. "The family of four live in the kitchen, which is about four by four meters. The furniture consists of a coal and wood burning stove, a bed, a daybed, one table for preparing and eating meals, one table where the children do their homework, a wardrobe, a few chairs, a small table with a Philips radio (broken down and the family cannot afford repairs), a cupboard for dishes and a shelf for pots and pans.

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5. "The hall, about three by three meters, holds two daybeds, a table, a cupboard, a clothes rack and a coal stove. Two sixth grade pupils from a country district are lodging there, paying 60 lev rent per month.
6. "Another small room, remodeled from the original kitchen, about one and one-half by two meters, is occupied by two young working girls. The room is furnished with a daybed, a small table, two chairs, a clothes rack, a coal stove and a small basin with running water. The girls, aged 18 and 20, work in the Georgi Kirov textile factory. They pay 60 lev per month for this lodging. They share the one bed, clean the room themselves, eat partly in the factory canteen and partly at home. Their parents sometimes send them food from the country.
7. "The two young pupils eat regularly at home. They get food from their parents in the country. Sometimes their landlady cooks them something, but their usual meal is bread and cheese or something sent from their parents. They clean their own room and wash in the kitchen, the owners' room. In the kitchen the wife sleeps with both children in the bed. The husband uses the daybed.

Working Hours

8. "The day usually starts in this household at 3:00 AM. The two working girls work every other week on the early shift, which starts at 5:00 AM. In order to get to work on time they have to get up at 3:00, because there is no public transport and they must walk over three kms. They return home from the early shift at 2:00 or 2:30 PM. When they work on the second shift they leave about noon and return about 10:00 PM.

9. "The husband gets up about 5:00 AM. His workshop is near his home, and the work starts at 6:00. He comes home for lunch during his hour's break at noon and finishes at 5:00 PM. The children and young lodgers go to school at either 8:00 AM or 2:00 PM; one week the school hours are in the morning, the next in the afternoon. The children in one family may attend different sessions.

Purchase of Food

10. "The main theme of daily life is the constant worry how to get enough food to feed the family. The wife gets up early in the morning to send her husband to work and her children to school. There is no tea, coffee or milk; unobtainable or too expensive. Skimmed fresh milk costs 2.40 lev per liter and must be fetched from a state dairy. At times village women bring fresh milk into Pleven, selling it for three lev per liter. So, the children in this family drink no milk. The first few days after payday (third and eighteenth of each month) the mother fries a sort of pancake on oil for her children's breakfast. Most of the time they get just a piece of bread with cheese or go without.
11. "After sending off her children, the housewife quickly cleans the room, then rushes out to shop for lunch and supper. She goes first to the Gradska Zelewtchoukova Targoviya (City Vegetable Market). The queues of women are long. She learns what is for sale that day and stands in line. The women are worried and hurried; some have had to leave small children at home unattended. Quarrels will arise for little reason. Sometimes after a wait of one-two hours, the people will be told that the transports have not arrived that day. They will leave empty-handed. Other times everything will be sold out by the time a person reaches the head of the queue.
12. "After her shopping, the housewife returns home to start cooking. If the shopping has been successful she prepares what she has bought. If not, she must draw on her reserves: lentils, sometimes beans or flour. After payday the family eats meat (two or three times a month) and the wife buys a little oil (15 lev per kilo) or lard (22 lev per kilo), less frequently butter (cow butter at 27 lev per kilo or buffalo [sic] butter at 24 lev per kilo). There are no queues for meat or fats because so few people can afford them. In early 1953 there was no sugar or rice on the market for several months. The housewife has to calculate her expenses very carefully to make her money last to the end of the month. She puts aside the bread money, spending what is left on other items. Sometimes a neighbor will come in to report that cheese is on sale, but she cannot afford it. It is possible to live without cheese but not without bread. It is sad when one sees the nine-year-old son come in and beg his mother to buy some white bread that he has seen for sale in a certain place. She has to refuse. The daughter will beg to go to the movies, and she too must be refused because tickets cost 1.30, 2.30 and 3.30 lev.

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13. "Yet this family has a higher income (600 lev in wages and 240 lev in lodging fees per month) than the general Bulgarian standard. Though the wife is extremely efficient, the family eats dry bread the last days before payday. Apart from food expenses there are the bills for electricity (24-25 lev per month), water (100 lev per year) and school supplies etc.

Daily Routine

14. "The mother's day is full of cooking, marketing and darning. The husband comes home for lunch between twelve and one. Because fuel is so scarce the husband may have a cold snack so that the children may have something heated. The lodgers use the stove in the owners' room. In the afternoon somebody is bound to come from the CP or some organization to tell the wife to do some job. She has to drop everything and resign herself to doing that she is told, hoping that she will be back by 5:00 PM. She also has to study Russian; she belongs to the Bulgarian-Soviet Friendship Society and the study of Russian is compulsory.

15. "About 6:00 PM the whole family gathers at home. The wife prepares supper. The children do their homework. In the evening both parents usually have to attend a meeting or a course. This tires them and bores them, but they know that there is no way out. If they don't attend such things regularly the Communists will start watching them, will make their life difficult and will expel their children from school. After 10 PM the girls come back from the factory, if they have been on the late shift.

Sunday Routine

16. "If a Sunday is not taken up with some kind of compulsory work or meeting or movie, the whole family goes for a walk to Keylukr [sic] or stays home. There is no money for pleasures or incidental expenses."

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LITERARY SUBJECT & INDEX CODES

781.11	20M
781.12	20M
781.13	20M
855.1	20M
781.41	20M

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